



***A UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE (USPS) REPORT
FOR NEW YORK'S 13TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT***

An in-depth report of post offices servicing the neighborhoods of Harlem, East Harlem, northern Manhattan and the north-west Bronx

Presented by Rep. Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)



“I have long been concerned about the United States Postal Service’s (USPS) ability to provide prompt, reliable, and efficient services to our communities. I often hear from my constituents their concerns and frustrations with longer wait times, reduced staff and language barriers when visiting local post offices... Innovation leads to success and reliable service is essential to ensuring residents can fully utilize the important benefits provided by the USPS.”

– Representative Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)



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UNITED STATES POST OFFICE RESEARCH REPORT

An in-depth report of post offices servicing the neighborhoods of Harlem, East Harlem, northern Manhattan and the north-west Bronx

Introduction

The United States Postal Service is an independent agency of the federal government, which was established by *Article 1. Section 8 Clause 7 in the U.S. Constitution*, to provide postal service across all regions of the United States.

As the title of this report indicates, there is room for the USPS to improve their customer service processes. When constituents submit complaints to my offices, they are often related to a substandard experience and customer service programs at our local USPS offices. Unfortunately, these complaints are not concentrated to any one area, they span across all of New York's 13th Congressional District.

To identify holes in USPS's processes, I tasked my congressional staff with the challenge of surveying residents who had engaged with any of the 13 post offices located in my district. The results of the survey provide a 'snapshot' of the postal service in the district and, hopefully, will lead to improved services for constituents.

Scope of Assessment

All thirteen branches in the District, which serve roughly 600,000 people, were assessed during this survey (175 respondents). The sample population was notably diverse and accurately represented our district – a melting pot of Hispanic, African American, Caucasian, and Asian American communities. Constituents were approached at the district’s postal offices and asked to participate in a voluntary survey. The results of the survey, married with the ongoing complaints my office fields from constituents on a daily basis, are as follows:



Photo: College Station post office at 3:00pm. Constituents waited for over an hour, with only one window open to provide service.

Top Five Systemic Issues:

[Results were determined by survey results and review of historical constituent complaints*]

1. Waiting in line for up to two hours
2. Negative customer service experience with post office employees
3. Mail and delivery theft, and phishing committing financial crimes
4. Late or missing delivery of mail and packages
5. Lack of package and shipping materials in post offices

Complaints and Demographics by Neighborhood

WEST HARLEM (pop: 131,200)

Location	Response	Satisfaction	Professionalism of Employees	Well Trained Employees	Language Needs Met	Needs Met	Experienced Discrimination
Hamilton Grange	Agree	50%	50%	60%	63%	63%	9%
	Neutral	15%	20%	5%	5%	11%	0%
	Disagree	35%	30%	35%	32%	26%	91%
Manhattanville	Agree	32%	36%	36%	57%	57%	25%
	Neutral	14%	18%	9%	10%	0%	0%
	Disagree	55%	45%	55%	33%	43%	75%

Table 1, Constituent feedback on USPS service in West Harlem

Generally, in **West Harlem**, the complaints pertain to long wait times, mail delivery, or security issues. Presumably, these challenges are due to an insufficient number of employees, which is the main catalyst of long waiting times for constituents; *this problem is consistent across all offices in the 13th District.*

The Percy Sutton (**Manhattanville**) branch has demonstrated mail delivery problems, including: delivering mail to the wrong mailbox in apartment complexes, leaving packages left unattended or mistreated upon delivery, and unprofessional interactions between delivery representatives and constituents.

The problems stemming from the **Hamilton Grange** branch are more serious. Reports indicate that mail with sensitive information has been delivered to the wrong address, left sitting at the post office, or completely lost. Specifically, constituents have revealed that envelopes containing checks have gone missing. Survey results also indicate that both the amount of packaging and shipping materials available in the post office and self-service kiosks is insufficient.

CENTRAL HARLEM (pop. 131,900)

Location	Response	Satisfaction	Professionalism of employees	Well Trained Employees	Language Needs Met	Needs Met	Experienced Discrimination
College Station	Agree	73%	70%	80%	75%	70%	25%
	Neutral	9%	10%	10%	13%	10%	0%
	Disagree	18%	20%	10%	13%	20%	75%
Morningside	Agree	40%	62%	67%	55%	70%	17%
	Neutral	35%	19%	14%	15%	0%	0%
	Disagree	25%	19%	19%	30%	30%	83%

Table 2, Constituent feedback on USPS service in Central Harlem



Photo: College Station post office displaying the lack of supplies available for constituents.

In **Central Harlem**, complaints are similar; constituents are experiencing long wait times, lack of post office supplies, and poor mail delivery results. When surveyors went to observe the **College Station** location, there were only two employees assisting with general services, with one other employee available for money orders and package pick up. An analysis of the historical complaints suggests that elderly residents, who live nearby in walk-up buildings, are not receiving their packages. Another compounding factor is the branch's lack of seating for customers who are waiting in line.

Understaffing has tangibly impacted the **Morningside** office. At one point, due to staff illness, this branch opened late one Saturday, which led to constituents waiting in the rain for up to two hours. Presumably, these considerations are affecting the staff — complaints show that staff is occasionally inconsiderate with constituents. Additionally, phishing is rampant, with mail frequently being stolen.

In contrast, constituents from **Colonial Park** rated their experience as mostly positive. Even when they refused to participate in the survey, patrons verbally stated that this location was clean, well-organized, and efficient. During our visit to this branch we observed that the average wait time ranged



Colonial Park post office as constituents wait in line to send and pick up packages for less than 20 minutes, proving to be one of the most efficient post offices in the district.

from five to fifteen minutes, which is relatively reasonable. Additionally, one of the employees spoke Spanish, which was helpful for Spanish speakers.

EAST HARLEM (pop. 121,700)

Location	Response	Satisfaction	Professionalism of employees	Well Trained Employees	Language Needs Met	Needs Met	Experienced Discrimination
Hellgate	Agree	80%	90%	80%	80%	89%	20%
	Neutral	0%	0%	10%	0%	11%	20%
	Disagree	20%	10%	10%	20%	0%	60%
Lincolnton	Agree	89%	89%	78%	100%	89%	25%
	Neutral	0%	11%	22%	0%	11%	0%
	Disagree	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	75%

Table 3, Constituent feedback on USPS service in East Harlem

In **East Harlem**, the constituent complaints are not unique—delivery problems and understaffing remain rampant. For example, a delivery woman was assaulted by a tenant in a building (60 East 102nd St.) on the delivery route on October 12, 2017. Following the incident, residents were forced to collect their mail at the post office. This caused a huge inconvenience resulting in the late delivery of pertinent mail, including bill notices. This termination of delivery went on for several months into the holiday season. The original mail carrier was placed back on the route in January 2018.

Aside from these universal issues, constituents in this area were notably disappointed in service around the holidays. Most of the complaints related to the holiday rush were aligned with the district-wide, year-round complaints.



Photo: Hellgate Post Office is notorious for its long lines. Photo taken in January 2016 showing long wait times; taken by Yelp user Richard B.

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS AND INWOOD (pop. 216,500)

Location	Response	Satisfaction	Professionalism of employees	Well Trained Employees	Language Needs Met	Needs Met	Experienced Discrimination
Audubon	Agree	36%	73%	64%	91%	82%	10%
	Neutral	9%	0%	27%	0%	9%	10%
	Disagree	55%	27%	9%	9%	9%	80%
Inwood	Agree	50%	60%	70%	78%	70%	14%
	Neutral	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	14%
	Disagree	50%	40%	20%	22%	30%	71%
Fort George	Agree	76%	76%	64%	83%	75%	10%
	Neutral	8%	8%	20%	4%	4%	0%
	Disagree	16%	16%	16%	13%	21%	90%
Washington Bridge	Agree	36%	30%	48%	43%	48%	44%
	Neutral	32%	22%	17%	13%	14%	56%
	Disagree	32%	48%	35%	43%	38%	N/A

Table 4, Constituent feedback on USPS service in Washington Heights and Inwood

For post offices in the **Washington Heights** and **Inwood** area, the feedback was similar to other districts, with several nuances. For instance, despite being in a heavily Hispanic district the post office employees often did not speak Portuguese or Spanish. In addition to the language barriers, these locations are so understaffed that the employees often do not have breaks during a shift; which, depending on the circumstances, could be a violation of state law. Lastly, the size of these offices is too small relative to the communities they serve, which causes frustration among customers and may be problematic under inclement weather conditions.



The **Washington Bridge**, **Juan Mariel Alcantara (Inwood)**, and **Audubon** branches have numerous complaints regarding their service. Generally, constituents thought the service was poor and the process was hampered by understaffed offices. In both locations, customers consistently described long lines. At the Washington Bridge location specifically, the buildings' heating system led to uncomfortably-cool conditions, according to seniors.

In contrast, both the **Fort George and Fort Washington** branch received positive feedback for their customer service and professionalism. However, like other offices, the understaffing has induced extended wait times. One constituent left feedback that there is a tendency for packages to become lost when they are mailed from the branch. Therefore, the constituent began to ensure her packages as a precautionary measure to track them in the event the package is lost. As a result, the constituents are spending more money to send packages. Additionally, ongoing phishing crimes have been reported in the surrounding area.

Overall, the feedback for the Washington Heights/Inwood neighborhood is far from favorable. The physical conditions of the post office could cause a public safety risk, especially with the constant overcrowding of the space, in the event of an emergency. The deliberate lack of customer service leads to frustrated constituents concerned about the lack of attention to their personal mail.

Specific Problematic Incidents and Concerns

This section highlights troubling incidents and concerns facing constituents in the district.

Elected Officials Communications:

- **New York State Senator Marisol Alcantara** is concerned about the lack of USPS mail collection boxes in Marble Hill; currently there is only a single mailbox for the whole area.
- **District Leader Maria Luna** phoned our office to state that the Audubon post office is extremely crowded, the employees are overworked without getting a lunch break, and there is a lack of Spanish-speaking personnel to assist the patrons.

Non-Compliance with Regulations:

- The Fort George branch does not have a wheelchair accessible ramp for constituents.
- Additionally at the Fort George branch, there is concern that the post office trucks are parked for a prolonged period (sometimes all day long). Additionally, there are parked post office trucks in front of fire hydrants for days on end. According to the complaint from a constituent, it appears the mail carriers are using the area as ‘a parking lot’.
- Post office trucks are parking around the island at Nagle and Broadway, causing low visibility for motorists, leaving pedestrians at risk.

Phishing:

- High incidents of phishing are taking place at the mailbox on Broadway and La Salle and mailbox on 123rd Street and Amsterdam avenue; here someone washed a check and rewrote it for \$8,000.

Lack of Professionalism

- At the Audubon branch a constituent endured a traumatic experience. After waiting for two hours to simply send a package, she was berated by employee at the service window for having her service dog with her. She was ultimately refused service and had the window slammed in her face by the angry employee.



Photo: Corporal Juan Mariel Alcantara (Inwood) Branch at 10:30 am on May 8, 2017. This photo came from a constituent Facebook group called “Calling for Inwood Post Office Improvement”, which features constituents discussing their experiences with the Inwood branch.

Subsequently, the manager of the branch came out and demanded a doctor's letter to justify her disability and the need of the service dog in front of a crowded branch. The branch has also lost her medication on several occasions.

- A constituent brought to our attention that a mailman was constantly leaving the mail delivery-cart unattended in front of 4791 Broadway apartment building, which inherently puts my constituents' mail and privacy at risk.
- The Manager of the Riayan A. Tejada (Washington Bridge) branch yelled at interns sent from my Harlem Office, who were cordially collecting survey data at that post office. They were there for two hours and the service was poor with extremely long lines.
- During the surveying, constituents also made note of the disparities in the postal services between district post offices in comparison to post offices in Lower Manhattan. Constituents noted that post offices in Lower Manhattan had more technology (DIY kiosks) and more secure mail boxes.

Recommendations to Improve Postal Service

The post offices in the district are currently functioning at an unacceptable level, and the distribution of services is inadequate based on the complaints and feedback from numerous constituents. Institutionally, a plethora of improvements are needed to solve many of the issues constituents are facing with the postal service. My office has put forth the following recommendations to help improve performance of the post offices operating throughout New York's 13th congressional district:

1. **USPS employees should regularly host townhall meetings:** in collaboration with community boards in the district, post office managers, and personnel to allow for public exchange of their concerns with the post office. This should include a public safety component to discuss safety measures that constituents can utilize to protect themselves from phishing.
2. **Keep records of wait times:** Each post office should keep record of wait times during different days of the week to ensure demand is met by having an adequate numbers of personnel.
3. **Post wait times and number of employees:** Disclose the anticipated wait times and number of employees available to assist customers.
4. **Keep records of erroneous mail:** Each post office should keep records of how much mail is erroneously delivered.
5. **Implement customer service training:** All USPS employees should be required to complete customer service training, in addition to training for their general job duties.
6. **Visibly identify employee roles:** Staff should wear pinned name tags with their job title, facing the constituent as a method for identification, in the event a specific worker becomes problematic.
7. **Further investigation:** should be conducted to determine if the postal service issues stem from lack of staffing in the post offices.

8. **Diversity & Inclusion:** New York City is a multi-racial and ethnic city. The diversity of New York is reflected in the district, and with diversity comes many languages as well. The USPS should staff its branches with personnel with bilingual or multi-lingual skills to suit the needs of each community it serves.
- Large signs should be posted in both Spanish and English asking, “How are we doing?”
 - These should also include pricing for postage and materials.
 - One bilingual supervisor should be present at every post office branch.
 - The post office should place survey forms, both in English and Spanish, at each branch soliciting feedback and asking specifics such as time, date, location, and employee’s name. Post office officials should meet periodically with elected officials to share the data collected from these suggestions.

USPS Postal Initiative Feedback

On July 9, 2018, members of my congressional staff met with senior representatives of the USPS to discuss the recommendations to improve service as well as measures to resolve postal issues within the district. Several USPS postal initiatives were shared during the meeting that the postal service has implemented or will soon roll out. These include: 1) placing parcel lockers in NYCHA and 3333 Broadway housing complexes; 2) recently placed redesigned mailboxes in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan that include new security and keys to prevent phishing -- these new boxes will be placed throughout the district; 3) Manhattanville Station has “Gold-Post” parcel lockers whereby constituents may send their packages to this station and can retrieve them up to 8:00 p.m. during the week; 4) Hamilton Grange Station had an ADA ramp installed for individuals with disabilities as well as made several upgrades to the facility’s interior; 5) Several Bronx and Manhattan stations are hosting “Passport Sundays” to alleviate the waiting for passport services; 6) Facilities throughout the district now offer “Informed Delivery,” a notification service to monitor the arrival of mail and packages.

These initiatives are essential to our efforts to build a better postal service infrastructure which also includes educating the public on the services available to them.

Conclusion

Considering the numerous complaints my offices have received about post offices in my district, it was important to conduct outreach, document the trends, and determine the magnitude of the problems constituents are experiencing. Clearly, there are consistent issues plaguing our community, including: long wait times, lost or undelivered packages, understaffing, and unsatisfactory delivery practices. Due to the time-sensitive nature of USPS' work, when systemic mistakes plague an area, a negative cascading effect reverberates throughout the organization, which leads to elementary mistakes (e.g. lack of mailing resources in a branch).

It is impossible to overstate the impact that this has on my constituents, which at this point has reached a crux with USPS – privacy risks, forfeiture of time, and financial sacrifices incurred due to lost or delayed items – are far too great of a burden for my community to bear. My office will tirelessly pursue resolutions at the local, state, and federal levels of government until the Postal Service rectifies these issues and provides an adequate level of service for the constituents of New York's 13th Congressional District.

Additional Photographs of Washington Bridge Post Office Provided by a Constituent



Postal worker left this USPS cart unattended for a long-period of time.

Post Office Addresses

Neighborhood	Name	Address	Community Board	Zip Code
West Harlem	Manhatanville (Percy Sutton)	365 W 125 th St. Ste 2A	9	10027
	Morningside Annex	365 W 125 th Ste. 2B	9	10027
	Hamilton Grange Station	521 W 146 th St.	9	10031
Central Harlem	Morningside	232 W 116 th St.	10	10026
	College Station	217 W 140 th St.	10	10030
	Colonial Park	99 Macombs Pl.	10	10039
	Hamilton Grange	521 W 146 th St.	10	10039
East Harlem	Triborough Finance New	118 W 124 th St.	11	10035
	Hellgate Station (Oscar Garcia Rivera)	153 E. 110 th St.	11	10029
	Lincolnton	2266 5 th Ave.	11	10037
Washington Heights	Audubon	511 W 165 th St.	12	10032
	Fort Washington	556 W 158 th St. Frnt 1	12	10032
	Washington Bridge (Riayan A. Tejeda)	518 W 181 st St.	12	10033
	Fort George	4588 Broadway	12	10040
Inwood	Inwood (Corporal Juan Mariel Alcantra)	90 Vermilyea Ave.	12	10034
Bronx	Jerome Station	2549 Jerome Ave	7	10468
	Botanical Station	2963 Webster Avenue	7	10458
	Van Cott Station	3102 Decatur Avenue	7	10467
	Mosholu Station	3464 Jerome Avenue	7	10467
	Kingsbridge Station	5517 Broadway	8	10463